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Inquiry Degraded . . .

By William S. White

Frightening Kernel of Truth

THE BEATNIK left-wing movement, with open and undenied Communist support and direction, has accomplished something it has never been able to accomplish before.



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It has degraded and destroyed a lawful inquiry of the Congress of the United States which was intended not to question anybody's "right to dissent" but only to consider legislation to forbid American citizens to give material aid and comfort to a Communist enemy in the middle of a shooting war in Vietnam.

This is the incredible and frightening kernel of truth in all the bitter chaff thrown up in recent days before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

That the Committee itself was in some instances ham-handed and inept is undoubtedly true. That some of its actions, and notably the rough arrest and ejection from the proceedings of an attorney, Arthur Kinoy, were foolish and extreme is also true. Finally, it is equally true that the Committee itself has had a bad record from a bad past, even though its procedures of recent years have been essentially fair and decent.

ITS "IMAGE" of old was just ugly enough to present

to the Communists and fellow travelers a splendid opportunity to smear its present, and utterly legitimate, purposes. It is tragic, in short, that Congress approached a vitally necessary project, that of making sound law to get at the terrible novelty of open subversion in wartime in this country, through this mechanism.

For this approach gave to the Communists just the stick they needed to make a beaten mockery of civilized discussion in a civilized parliamentary climate. It is sad beyond measure that the leadership of the House was not able to put this grave issue before a committee of unchallengeable past and present so that the lefties could not turn its deliberations into a howling farce in which all who questioned or disagreed with them became "finks." How splendidly intellectual, indeed, in passing and in parenthesis, is the new rhetoric of the "intellectual" new left; of these leaders of the new thought, these incessant pleaders for the right to disagree.

IN THE GROTESQUE debris of this episode, nevertheless, it is important that some central and crucial truths are not forever buried under all the screeching to which the country has been subjected.

Fact No. 1, not to be sunk in the baying pseudo-martyrdom of the lefties, is that this inquiry was opened with the most careful limitations upon its objectives. It is

well to recall them now, so that fairminded and responsible people, at least, will not forget them.

"These hearings," said the chairman, Rep. Joe Pool, at the outset, "are concerned with overt acts, not mere expressions of opinion. Sending aid, or attempting to send aid, to an enemy of the United States is an overt act; it is not mere dissent. Obstructing the movement of armed forces personnel and supplies (to Vietnam) is an overt act; it is by no stretch of the imagination mere dissent. Organized propagandizing for and acting in behalf of the Communist Government of North Vietnam or the Vietcong is not mere dissent."

Fact No. 2, also to be remembered, is that again at the very outset a recanting former member of the pro - Chinese Communist Progressive Labor movement, Philip Luce, predicted in advance precisely how the Communists and frontiers would destroy the hearing. So they did, down to the last detail.

But were they, after all, really Communists or only misled lads? Let one of them, Richard Mark Rhoads of Brooklyn, give the answer. "Are you trying to learn if I'm a Communist?" he demanded. "I certainly am a Communist."

And this was his final scream to the Committee: "Get out of Vietnam!"